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Politics of Piety: The Basij and Moral Control of Iranian Society

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Politics of Piety: The *Basij* and Moral Control of Iranian Society

SAEID GOLKAR

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This article aims to analyze the role of the Basij *militia in asserting moral control over Iranian society, with a particular focus on the Basij's elevated stature following the end of the Iran–Iraq war. The article examines how and why the Basij became involved in enforcing the principle of* Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar *(commanding the right and forbidding the wrong), a critical component of the Iranian regime's strategy to create a "pious society" and enforce moral behavior. Of the few publications on morality control within Iran, none consider the paramount contributions of the Basij. Given the Basij's ongoing expansion and its influence in Iranian society, however, further study of this force's functions is vital to understanding Iran's internal security and control mechanisms. This article seeks to shed greater light on the Basij militia and its role in morality control in postrevolutionary Iran.*

KEYWORDS Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar, Basij *militia, iran, moral control, social control*

INTRODUCTION

For thirty years, the Islamic regime has relentlessly tried to expand its political control over Iranian society. One of the mechanisms by which the regime will likely expand its authority in the future is the strategic use of the paramilitary *Basij-e Mostaz'afin* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer militia as a morality police force.

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The function of "morality police" in Islamic societies is to impose order and discipline and enforce Islamic codes of behavior, such as the wearing of the *hijab* (veil) by women in public streets, workplaces, and parks, and the prohibition of male-female fraternization. To establish a moral society or, in other words, to "Islamize" the society, the Islamic regime has designed many plans, generated much legislation, and established various organizations.

One of the most important strategies has been the implementation of *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* (commanding the right and forbidding the wrong), a Qur'anic commandment that encourages all Muslims to do what is good/right and prohibits them from that which is wrong/evil, not only in social relations, but also in political relationships, such as that between citizens and the government. According to this principle, Muslims have an obligation to implement this order to prevent un-Islamic behavior. For this reason, Article 8 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran calls on everyone to apply this principle in his or her daily life.[1]

To implement this article, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established a Morality Bureau, *Dayereh-e Amre be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar*, to promote Islamic codes and prevent citizens from engaging in un-Islamic behavior. In the first decade after the revolution, the Islamic revolutionary committees (*kommitehha-e enghalab eslami*) were responsible for enforcing this morality control and confronting "moral crimes" or "immoral behavior," such as extramarital sexual relationships, alcohol consumption, the playing of loud music, gambling, and make-up.

Since the establishment of the Basij in 1980, the organization has collaborated with the Islamic revolutionary committees to exert moral control over the society. In the decade following the revolution and during the Iran–Iraq war, the main role of the Basij was recruiting, organizing, and deploying volunteers to the warfront. Soon after, however, the regime asked the militia to cooperate with other police forces and the Islamic revolutionary committees to establish moral control over the society. Toward this end, the Islamic parliament passed a law in 1986 that ordered the Basij to collaborate with other committees in fighting against drug dealers, smugglers, and other criminals.[2] With the end of the war and the return of the Basijis from the warfront, the regime used members as a morality police in place of the revolutionary committees, which were combined with the urban police and rural gendarmerie in 1991.

In the second decade following the revolution, the Basij assumed the primary responsibility for enforcing and controlling Iran's morality codes.

[1]Azam Khatam, "The Islamic Republic's Failed Quest for the Spotless City," *Middle East Report*, no. 250 (Spring 2009), http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/khatam.html (accessed July 29, 2011).

[2]Seyed Mostafa Torabi and Nabiyollah Rohi, *Basij dar Parto Ghanoon* [*Basij in the Light of Law*] (Tehran: Aye Cultural Publications, 2000), 63–64.

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The end of the war with Iraq in 1988 and the start of the "construction era" during the Hashemi Rafsanjani presidency (1989–97) were accompanied by a decline in the revolutionary fervor that had dominated the society in the first decade after the revolution. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who became Supreme Leader following Khomeini's death in 1989, tried to find a new social status among conservatives and especially people returning from the war. Therefore, he designated the need to deal with the "cultural invasion" of enemies as an important priority. "Cultural invasion," according to Khamenei, was the penetration of Western culture, such as liberalism, into Islamic societies with the aim of destroying Islamic values and culture. For him, the war was not finished; instead, its status had just changed from a hot war between Iran and Iraq to a cold one between Iran and the West. Khamenei ordered the Basij to become involved in this new "war" to uphold Islamic norms and ensure that Islamic ethics were propagated throughout the society. In an important speech in July 1992, he emphasized that *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* was the key for success in this struggle.[3]

On the Supreme Leader's orders, a bureau for the "revival of commanding right and forbidding the wrong" (*Setad-e ehia Amre be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar*) was formed, and Ayatollah Ahmed Jannati, one of the most conservative members of the clergy, was appointed as its chief. According to its charter, the bureau was completely independent of the country's executive, parliament, and judiciary,[4] and the Basij was one of its main instruments for enforcing Islamic norms in the society.

To fulfill this mission, the Basij appointed a new deputy and established a special unit, the *Gharargahe Sayed-al Shohada* (Sayed-al Shohada garrison), in Tehran for recruiting, organizing, and using the Basijis. As a first step, in 1991–92, the Basij conducted a series of studies on the existence and extent of the "cultural invasion" in Iranian society and organized several conferences that aimed to find ways to confront it. According to the United Nations Special Commission on Human Rights, more than 113,000 people were arrested in Iran during this period on charges of "moral corruption" and "insufficient veiling."[5]

Realizing that the implementation of Islamic codes would involve confrontation with the citizens, and that there was need for a juridical basis to support the Basijis, parliament passed a new law in 1992 at the behest of

[3]Didar Ba Farmandhan Gordanha-e Ashoura, [Meeting with Ashoura battalion's commanders], July 13, 1992, http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=606 (accessed July 29, 2011).

[4]Parvaneh Tila, "Basta Amer be Maruf bary moshrekat va hambastghi meli, naghesh va ebtekar Basij" ["The Basij and the Expansion of Commanding the Right and Forbidding the Wrong for National Participation and Solidarity"], *Basij Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 26 (Spring 2005): 59.

[5]Samira Mohyeddin, "Iran's Islamic Cultural Revolution: Cultural Authenticity, Revolutionary Ideologues, and Women as Markers of the Nation," *Iran Analysis Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (March 2005): 32.

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Ayatollah Khamenei. Called the Judicial Protection of the Basij Act, this legislation allowed militiamen to work as judicial agents to enforce law and order alongside the police. It is worth mentioning that in 1987, when Ayatollah Khomeini was alive, the judiciary had rejected the use of Basijis as judicial officials.[6] The new law stipulated:

> The Basij Resistance Force (BRF), like other judicial officers, has permission to take necessary actions whenever a crime is observed (*jorm-e mashhood*) and the police is absent, or when the police is not responding fast enough, or when the police asks for their help. In these situations, Basijis have to prevent the disappearance of the criminal evidence, and the flight of the accused, and prepare and send a report to the judicial authorities.[7]

After the passage of the law, the Basij became involved even more deeply in imposing Islamic morals, opening many executive centers for implementation of *Amr be Maruf* in cities throughout Iran. Additionally, the Basij began to organize its active members into "Hezbollah cells" in each Basij base. These cells, which usually had nine members, were responsible for enforcing Islamic norms in each neighborhood.[8] Three cells formed a group (*Dasteh*), and three Dasteh made up a Hezbollah company in each Basij zone or regional office. Regular Basiji sometimes collaborated with these groups as "colleagues of Hezbollah" (*Hamyar-e Hezbollah*). Basijis were also required to undergo special training, and regular Basiji who failed to pass the training were required to undergo forty-eight-hour ideological "re-education" sessions.[9] According to one report, in 1994 alone, 300,000 Basiji were recruited to push back the cultural invasion, and 300,000 were hired for the purpose of commanding good and preventing evil.[10]

After the formation of these groups, in March 1993, one of the Basij's commanders, General Mohammed Hejazi, announced that from then onwards, the main mission of the Basij would be implementing *Amr be Maruf*.[11] Subsequently, the Basij started its battle against cultural invasion

[6]Javad, Tamasebi, "Zabet ghazei kistand, basij va zabet ghazaee" ["Who Is Judiciary Officer: The Basij and Judiciary Officers"], *Aeein Dadrsai Magazine,* no. 36 (1999): 67.

[7]Torabi and Rohi, *Basij dar Parto Ghanoon*, 44.

[8]Ali Reza Afshar, "Ashna'ei ba tashkilat va ma'mooriyathaye Basij" ["A Guide to Basij Organization and Missions"], *Basij Studies Quarterly*, no. 1 (Summer 1993): 18.

[9]Mehdi Khani, *Daramadi bar shankhat Basij* [*Introduction to Basij Recognition*] (Tehran: Culture and Knowledge Institute, 2001), 91.

[10]See Haideh Moghissi and Saeed Rahnema, "The Working Class and the Islamic State in Iran," in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 280–300.

[11]Azam Khatam, "Struggles over Defining the Moral City: The Problem called 'Youth' in Urban Iran," in *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, ed. Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 215.

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and declared June 17–26, 1994, to be "*Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* Week."[12] During this week, the Basij stepped up confrontations with women wearing "indecent hijab" and youth wearing clothes out of line with the imposed Islamic codes.

The Basij's involvement in the moral control of society further increased after the Islamic Parliament issued a new law assigning them the responsibility of confiscating satellite dishes. Under these laws, which were ratified in September 1994, the Parliament prohibited any importation, manufacturing, and utilization of dishes and instructed the Ministry of the Interior to use Basiji members to collect and destroy satellite dishes and antennas with the least possible delay.[13] As a result, over the next few years, the Basij continued to operate as a morality police force. Basij patrols arrested many people, especially youth, on the streets and in workplaces, universities, and other public places on charges of moral crime. During the 1995 "Basij week" alone, militia members issued verbal warnings to about 1,889,000 people throughout Iran, ordering them to follow the Islamic code.[14]

The task of confronting the "cultural invasion" was not limited to enforcing Islamic dress codes either; the Basijis also attacked publications and cinemas, which they perceived as symbols of cultural invasion, closing down publishers and bookstores such as *Morgh-e Amin*, which was actually firebombed. In 1995, they attacked university students attending a talk by Abdolkarim Sorosh, an Islamic intellectual at Tehran University. Although public dissatisfaction grew in response to these activities, some Revolutionary Guard commanders, such as Mohsen Rezai, defended Basij actions, stating that "the duty of the Basij Force is not only security and protection, but also challenging counterrevolutionary forces."[15]

With the victory of Mohammed Khatami and the reformists in the 1997 elections, the activity of the Basij as morality police decreased. Between 1997 and 2004, the number of Basij checkpoints in cities and public places dropped. The conservative wing of the regime, however, actively worked to create a new plan for exerting moral control over the society. On February 3, 1997, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, controlled by the Supreme Leader, approved practical measures for the promotion of "chastity culture." Moreover, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) publicly supported the Basij's ongoing activities. One IRGC commander announced

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[12]"Gozrashi Piramon-e Namayeshghah Tahajom-e Farhanghi va Gorfe- Markez Motaleat-e Basij" ["A Report of the Exhibition on Cultural Invasion and the Basij's Center of Study Booth], *Basij Studies Quarterly*, no. 3–4 (Summer/Fall 1994): 181.

[13]Ali Banuazizi, "Iran's Revolutionary Impasse: Political Factionalism and Societal Resistance," *Middle East Report*, no. 191 (November/December 1994): 6.

[14]Shahram Khosravi, *Young and Defiant in Tehran* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 30.

[15]Ali Alfoneh, "The Revolutionary Guards' Role in Iranian Politics," *Middle East Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 3–14.

in 2001 that "in the next decade, our problem will be cultural onslaught and the Basij must block its progress.... Instead of creating military bases, our policy today is to create cultural societies."[16] Under the shadow of this support, some Basijis continued their enforcement activities in small and religious cities such as Kerman, where in 2001 several Basij members confessed to committing a chain of murders in the name of implementing *Amr be Maruf*. Moreover, in 2002, in an "*Amr be Maruf* maneuver," more than 70,000 Basijis gathered in a public place and warned people not to violate Islamic codes.[17] According to General Golamreza Ahmadi, the deputy of Basij's moral policing headquarters (*Gharargahe Sayed-al Shohada),* the Basij had established more than 5,000 councils of *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* in its bases throughout Iran by 2004.[18]

In spring 2004, the Department for Social Prevention and Protection was established within the judiciary to assist in enforcing Islamic codes. Controlled by conservatives, this department was given the responsibility of extending the regime's control over the society. According to its regulations an initial cell would be formed for this purpose in every mosque and neighborhood. Five such cells would combine to form one unit (*Vahed*). Each cell was supposed to be the "eyes and ears" of the judiciary in each neighborhood. Most of its personnel were members of the Basij, who were "responsible for gathering intelligence, crime-fighting, providing religious guidance, and the recognition of criminal people and places."[19] Like the other morality bureaus, the Basij was one of the main members of this bureau, which was controlled by the Chief of the Judiciary. Because this plan was approved by the judiciary when the reformists were in power, the conservatives shelved the plan when they took over power in 2005.

With the hardliners regaining power in 2005 and the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the ninth presidential election, the regime again dramatically increased its efforts to exert greater social and moral control over Iranian society. On July 26, 2005, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution approved a new plan for the "Promotion of Chastity" in Iran. Under this plan, a committee for the "promotion of the culture of modesty" was established in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, with the Basij as one of its main members.

[16]Frederic Wehrey et al., *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009), 28.

[17]"Manovr-e *Tazzakkor-e Lesani* Basij" ["The Basij's Maneuver for Oral Warning"], *Keyhan*(Tehran), November 26, 2002, 11.

[18]"Sazmandeh 95,000 *Naseh* and *Zabet basiji*" ["Organizing the 95,000 Basijis Bailiff"], *Sobeh-e Sadegh*(Tehran), no. 208 (July 4, 2005): 5, http://www.sobhesadegh.ir/1384/0208/M05.htm (accessed August 20, 2011).

[19]Ardeshir Moaveni, "New Militia Divides Hardliners in Iran," *Eurasianet.org*, December 7, 2004, http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120804a.shtml (accessed July 29, 2011).

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During this time, the presence of the Basij as a morality police force intensified, as did dissatisfaction with it. Some members of parliament questioned the interior minister about the expanded Basij patrols and checkpoints. Then-commander of IRGC, General Yahya Safavi, also voiced objections to Basijis' behavior during their missions and asked them to not get involved in citizens' lives. According to Safavi, who headed the Revolutionary Guards from 1997 to 2007, "Basijis have no right to stop a vehicle and ask people to show them their ID cards or inspect their CDs."[20] However, immediately after this statement, Basij commander General Hejazi claimed that the IRGC commander meant only that the Basijis could not stop people in the streets and should show them more respect during inspections.

To further implement the promotion of chaste culture, in the spring of 2007, law enforcement forces began a new series of morality plans in urban areas, which were called the "Social Safety Plan" (*Tarh-e amniat-e ejtemaee*) and held the ostensible aim of confronting thugs, drug dealers, thieves, and other criminal individuals. To restore the Basij's popularity, the chief of the police force, General Ahmadi Moghadam, who had previously been chief of the Tehran Basij, announced that the Basijis would not be involved in the plan, as he feared resistance to their presence.[21] In response, one of the Basij's commanders announced that the militia would not enter the police zone but would be ready to help the police whenever needed.[22] Soon after, in February 2008, the police asked the Basij to collaborate with them in targeting drug dealers and gangs of robbers to ensure the people's safety,[23] particularly during Charshanbe Soori, an ancient festival held on the eve of the last Wednesday of the Iranian calendar year, and the New Year holidays.

To halt the rising unpopularity of the Basij in March 2008, the new IRGC commander ordered that the Basij street inspections and checkpoints be transferred to the National Law Enforcement Agency (NAJA).[24] To this end, former chief of the militia Hojjat-al-Islam Hossein Taeb announced that the Basij would start a new security plan called "sustainable security" (*amniat-e payedar*) to expand its services. Under this plan, uniformed Basiji members

[20]"Farmandeh Kole Sepah-e Pasdaran: Dar kar Mardom Dekhalat Nakond" ["The IRGC Commander: Do Not Interfere in People's Lives"], *Etemad Meli* (Tehran), no. 69, April 29, 2006, 1.

[21]Behzad Keshimirpour, "The Collaboration of LEF and the Basij," *Deutsche Welle*, August 6, 2007, http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,2727473,00.html (accessed July 29, 2011).

[22]"Basij Tamayol be Vorad be vazayed niro entazami nadard" ["Basij Does Not Like to Interfere with the Police's Duties"], Fars News Agency (Tehran), April 22, 2007, http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8602010549 (accessed August 21, 2011).

[23]Khatam, "The Islamic Republic's Failed Quest for the Spotless City," 220.

[24]"Ist va Bazrasih-e Basij be NAJA Montaghle Mishavad" ["Checkpoint Will Be Assigned to the Basij by the NAJA"], *Alef*, March 25, 2008, http://alef.ir/content/view/23742/ (accessed July 29, 2011).

from all Basij bases would carry out "security patrols" from sunset to sunrise.[25] As a result, in the fall of 2008, the Basij began patrolling the streets of Tehran to help law enforcement forces maintain the Islamic dress code and arrest hardened criminals. According to the commander of the IRGC in Tehran, Abdollah Eraghi, the Basij was responsible for the identification of criminals, thugs, and drug dealers.

Under the auspices of maintaining order and controlling morality, the Basij expanded its presence in society and increased its cooperation with the police, especially by acting as informants. General Ahmad Reza Radan, deputy commander of the national police and police chief of Tehran, announced that the Basij would be in charge of neighborhood watch to ensure safety. To fulfill this duty, the Basijis would patrol the streets with personal vehicles because of their greater familiarity with their own neighborhoods.[26]

In 2009, the Basij also became involved in a new morality initiative, the *Tarh-e efaf va hijab* (hijab and chastity plan), that aimed to enforce the wearing of the hijab by arresting women for violating the Islamic dress code or wearing Western-style clothing. The primary responsibility for enforcement of this plan, which was a subset of the "Promotion of Chastity Plan," lay with the women of the Basij organization. The Basij held special courses for female Basijis to train "teachers of modesty and hijab" (*Morabi efaf va hijab*) and send them to public areas to promote the culture of hijab and enforce the Islamic dress code for women. According to the head of the female Basij, about 50,000 teachers were trained in 2010.[27] At the same time, article 180 of the fifth development plan also required the Basij to expand its activities in developing the culture of *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar*.

In June 2011, the Basij was asked to expand its reach by establishing one council of *Amr be Maruf* in each Basij base (*payegha*). According to new regulations, the head of the Basij in each base is responsible for implementing moral policing in each neighborhood, with both peaceful and coercive methods of enforcement permitted. This new regulation divides crimes into five categories: gang, security, social, economic, and culturally organized. Confrontations with political dissidents will be classified as security crimes, while social crimes will tackle issues such as prostitution, drug dealing, and the production and sale of alcoholic beverages. Internet and satellite

[25]"Aghaz Ghastehe Amaliati Basij," ["Starting the Basij Operational Patrols"], *Asriran*, November 15, 2008, http://www.asriran.com/fa/pages/?cid=56937.

[26]"Ejrae Tarh-e Gashte Basij, Ehsas Aminat ra dar Mahalat afzayesh Midahad" ["Implementation of Basij's Patrolling in Neighborhoods Will Increase the Security Feeling in Society"], *Hamasbari* (Tehran), December 27, 2008, http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news-71691.aspx (accessed July 29, 2011).

[27]"Ozveyat-e 50,000 Nafar Dar Shabeke Efaf va Hejab" ["Membership of 50,000 People in Network of Modesty and Hijab"], Hejab News Agency (Tehran), May 11, 2011, http://www.hijabnews.co/vdce.78pbjh8nw9bij.html (accessed August 20, 2011).

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equipment use will fall under the category of cultural crimes. Economic crimes will include everything from the smuggling of antiquities to pyramid schemes.[28]

STRUCTURE, MEMBERSHIP, AND ACTIVITIES

Within the Basij, an appointed deputy oversees the implementation of *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* and directs all Basij activities in this field. The main role in enforcement is played by *Nasehin* teams, which are located in each Basij base. Each base has at least one or two *Nasehin* or *Amr be Maruf* teams, usually consisting of five members. The organization is as follows:

- Chief of the *Amr be Maruf* team (*Nasehin* team)
- Member one: cultural member of *Amr be Maruf* (*farhanghi*)
- Member two: guidance and correction member of *Amr be Maruf* (*ershad va eslah*)
- Member three: educational member of *Amr be Maruf* (*amozshi*)
- Member four: intelligence-gathering member of *Amr be Maruf* (*shanasaei*).[29]

Although each team is responsible for the implementation of *Amr be Maruf*, each team member has a special area of duty: education, cultural matters, providing guidance and correction (*ershad va eslah*), and identifying and gathering intelligence (*shanasaei*). Besides these duties, the team is collectively responsible for giving verbal warning or oral guidance. Finally, these teams are responsible for identifying "non-Islamic" areas in each neighborhood.

The four *Nasehin* teams usually form a "*Nasehin* resistance group" in each Basij base. These groups are responsible for operating checkpoints in each neighborhood and implementing *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar*. Some *Nasehin* groups come together to form *Nasehin* units in each Basij zone, which serve as the main force for implementing Islamic codes and enforcing the Islamic morality order in society. One level up, an *Amr be Maruf* office in each Basij region directs the *Nasehin* units in its zones. Some of these offices are directed by an *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* garrison

[28]"Dastoramael Ejrae *Amre be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* dar paygehah Basij" ["Administrative Instructions of Commanding the Right and Prohibiting the Wrong in Basij Bases"], June 21, 2011, http://paigaheato.blogfa.com/post-135.asp (accessed August 20, 2011).

[29]IRGC, Deputy for Plans and Programs, *Jadvale Sazmanie Paygahe Moghavemate Basije Mohallat* [*Organization Chart of Neighborhood Basij Resistance Force Base*] (Tehran, 2004), 54.

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(*Gharargahe*) located in each province responsible for controlling Basij activities in the field of *Amr be Maruf*.

MEMBERS

According to Basij regulations, the Basijis who are active in the *Amr be Maruf* activities are divided into three groups: unlimited or first-level bailiff (*zabetin-e ghazaei-e Aam*), limited or second-level bailiff (*zabetin-e ghazaei-e khase*), and ordinary or third-level bailiff (*zabetin-e Aadi*) or *Nasehin*.[30] The *Nasehin* are only responsible for promoting and commanding Islamic shariah in society by giving oral guidance or verbal warning (*tazzakkor-e lesani*). They are organized as members of the *Nasehin* team. The second level of *Zabetin,* who serve as chiefs of the *Nasehin* teams, are mainly responsible for enforcing the Islamic codes. Therefore, they have more power to confront persons who break the moral law, especially when crimes take place in the presence of the officers, such as improper observance of the Islamic dress code. The most powerful Basiji judicial officers are those at the first level of *Zabetin*, who are usually appointed as chiefs of *Nasehin* resistance groups. These officers have an open hand in implementing the Islamic order and wield the power to arrest and capture offenders of the law.

Although all male and female Basijis can join *Nasehin* groups as ordinary judicial officers, only active Basijis can be members at the second level. Special full-member Basijis make up the first level (*Zabet*). In this regard, the ordinary members of *Nasehin* teams are regular Basijis, but the chief of each team or group is selected from among the *Zabetin*.[31]

According to Basij regulations, the selection of *Nasehin*, and especially *Zabetin,* is conducted by a Selection Deputy of the Basij, and the first-level *Zabetin* are approved by the intelligence branch of the Basij. In this way, membership is regulated according to ideological commitment, loyalty, and rank. All of the Basijis, including *Nasehin* and *Zabetin*, are required to pass some ideological training with regard to *Amr be Maruf*. While the *Nasehin* need to pass only two-day training, the *Zabetin* are required to undergo more extensive training held by the deputy of training and education of the Basij.

Although there is a lack of accurate statistics, in 2005, according to one Basij commander, more than 54,000 *Nasehin* and 50,000 *Zabetin* were working at more than 300 "*Amr be Maruf*" centers throughout Iran.[32] Like other members of the Basij, these people are poorly educated. According to a study

[30]Mahdi Javanmard, "Bazshenasi Jaygheh Basij Ba Roykardi-systemi" ["Recognition of the Basij Status with Systemic Approach"], *Basij Studies Quarterly*, no. 35 (Summer 2007): 74.

[31]IRGC, *Jadvale Sazmanie Paygahe Moghavemate Basije Mohallat*, 56.

[32]"Sazmandeh 95,000 *Naseh* and *Zabet basiji*," 5.

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by the Basij, about two-thirds of the *Zabetin* and *Nasehin* do not have high school diplomas, and only one-third have any diploma or higher education.[33] As a result, they have been criticized by many, including the Basij commander, for not being familiar with laws and regulations. Some Basijis have also pointed out that members at checkpoints often lack the required experience and training.[34]

ACTIVITIES

According to Basij regulations, the Basij is responsible for policing the populace and punishing infractions of the Islamic Republic's myriad moral laws.[35] Since the Islamic moral law or code of behavior is very broad, the field of Basij activities is wide. For example, this code includes, but is not limited to, enforcing religious modesty; ensuring the proper wearing of the hijab for women and checking male-female fraternization; prohibiting women from listening to Western music or wearing makeup, colorful scarves, and tight clothing; censuring men who sport Western hairstyles and women who wear loose-fitting scarves or shortened trousers; collecting and destroying satellite dishes; and clamping down on parties, social corruption, and so on.

As a loyal militia group, the Basijis serve as the regime's arm in confronting citizens. Although, according to the law, the Basij is allowed to do so only when a crime is observed, there are many reports of Basijis disrupting private gatherings and parties under the pretense of "countering immoral behavior."[36] Moreover, reports have also recounted incidents of the Basij attacking international organizations in big cities to check whether employees are following Islamic codes.

To implement *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* in Iranian society, the Basij and especially *Nasehin* teams are primarily responsible for identifying troublemakers, potential criminals, and "unclean" (*alodeh*) places in each neighborhood to prevent people from doing wrong.[37]

To expand its moral policing operations, the Basij has organized some of the *Nasein* (intelligence-gathering) members into networks called *Ayon*

[33]Gholam Reza Rahimi, "Kalaki, barasi nazaryat mojryam, barnameh rizan va mokhataban piramon barneh amozesh Nasehin" ["Study of Opinion of Executives of Experts, Education Planners, and Audiences about Training Program for *Nasehin*"], *Basij Studies Quarterly*, no. 26 (Spring 2005): 119–22.

[34]"Ist va Bazrasih-e Basij be NAJA Montaghle Mishavad."

[35]Matthew M. Frick, "Inside Iran's Revolutionary Guard," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 49 (Second Quarter 2008): 121–27.

[36]Arch Puddington, Aili Piano, and Camille Eiss, *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 341.

[37]*Jadvale Sazmanie Paygahe Moghavemate Basije Mohallat*, 56.

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(eyes). These networks already monitor society, identify troublemakers, and report any un-Islamic behaviors to Basij officials.

Two main types of *Ayon* networks exist: "vehicle eyes" (*Ayon-e Khodroei*), and "residency eyes" (*Ayone Amakan*). "Vehicle eyes" refer to Basij who monitor drivers behaving in violation of Islamic law. Examples of such violations include drivers listening to loud music, bringing pets into their car, or wearing improper hijab. These Basij networks report violators' license plate numbers and type of car to the police.[38] The police can then identify the car owners and send them to the court. Basijis who work as "residency eyes" search for and report any suspicious or "unclean" places within their neighborhood districts, including illegal breweries and prostitution houses. Additionally, "residency eyes" networks are also involved in ferreting out homes used for Christian worship.[39]

In addition to these networks, *Nasehin* teams rely on two main methods of enforcement: checkpoints (inspection and stop trap) and street patrols. These checkpoints and patrols are usually carried out in crowded areas, such as streets around universities, in squares, and at intersections, but they are also conducted in the mountains in the north of Tehran, where many people go hiking on weekends. Furthermore, the Basij use two kinds of street patrolling, visible and undercover. While visible patrolling is done by Basijis wearing uniforms and using official vehicles, undercover patrolling is done in personal vehicles and without uniforms.

Although *Nasehin* are active every day, their activities usually intensify during particular periods of national and religious holidays, such as the month of Ramadan or in Muharram. In a non-written code, every Thursday night (the last day of the week), the Basij establishes inspection checkpoints to check cars and motorcycles for "immoral" things, such as music CDs or alcohol. In addition to these checkpoints, they patrol the streets in groups of both men and women, as well as in personal vehicles. According to one of the Basij commanders, only 30 percent of Basij activities as morality police relate to "forbidding the wrong" (*Nahy az Monkar*) through patrolling and inspection checkpoints, while 70 percent involve giving guidance or ordering people to do good (*Amr be Maruf*).[40]

During these patrols and at checkpoints, suspects are detained by the *Nasehin* team in the Basij garrison of the *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar*

[38]*Avalin Gozrash Komission Sazemanah Ejaraei setad Amer be marouf –e Ostan Fars dar sale 1384* [*The First Report of the First Session of* Amr be Maruf *Council in Fars Province in 2004*], July 17, 2005, http://www.ehya.ir/mo_show.asp?gid=/0/6/49/&id=92 (accessed August 20, 2011).

[39]Gary Lane "House Churches Growing in Iran," *CBN.com,* September 5, 2008,http://www.cbn.com/CBNnews/437006.aspx (accessed August 20, 2011).

[40]General Mir Ahmadi, "Basij and Cultural NATO," *Hamshari* (Tehran), December 15, 2006, http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1385/851014/world/siasatw.htm (accessed July 29, 2011).

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located in each Basij region. Some youth are released to their parents on the grounds that parents will take responsibility for reprimanding their children and will provide assurance that the youth will not repeat their behavior, while others are sent to the special *Amr be Maruf* court.

CONCLUSION

For years, the regime has used the Basij to bring Iranian society under Islamic moral control by using the Basiji as morality police, who are present everywhere in society to combat un-Islamic behavior and social corruption and impose Islamic moral behavior. Although the regime declares that the presence of the Basij has helped to ensure security, the expansion of such activities has increased intimidation and fear, leading to a heightened and pervasive sense of insecurity.

Although involving the Basij in *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* has not helped the regime create a pious society, it has also caused hatred for the Basij to expand among Iranians, especially among the youth. That is why, despite three decades of struggle to create a moral society, Iranian themselves feel distanced from the Islamic values promoted by the clergy. For example, Iran under the Islamic revolutionary regime, has one of the highest crime rates of all Islamic countries. In fact, imposing Islam in every sector of Iranian society has proven counterproductive—it has encouraged the flourishing of non-Islamic and even anti-Islamic behaviors within Iranian society. This "immoral" behavior is often used to express discontent with the regime and symbolize individuals' resistance to state power.

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